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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

DEATH WISH

BY

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1980

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Death Wish and Other Poems" submitted by Lorna Jean Uher in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date June 8th, 1979

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SHE MAKES ME BEAUTIFUL

1.

the worker she comes
every six months
i tell her
my mouth is raw
from eating soap
my back bleeds
from the strap

the foster father denies
says "It was her last
home/ those scars are
also in her head"
he smiles at the worker
pats my shoulder with
large hands they both
are smiling she says
"Be a good girl" drives away
in a big black car

my heart beats
like grouse drumming
his smiling eyes
are lizard's are glass
his hand holds the strap
dipped in the barrel
that catches rain

i want to swallow myself
whole

2.

i come home late from school
afraid
of the strap slow i pull
the spool handle of screen door

he bangs my brother's
head on the floor
i try to yell stop
                stop
try to call foster mother
leaning against the sink
but my words have broken
                wings
their feathers smother
my speaking

i become two people
                one watching
the other grabbing the rifle
that explodes rabbit and gopher
heads i point cold metal
at the father walking arm
outstretched eyes smiling
not believing "Give it here
or I'll wrap it round your neck"

but my eyes see
the blue strap
hanging by the kitchen door
see the brother's blood
shiny pools on linoleum

i shoot the father
shoot the mother the brother
trapped on the floor
by his teeth of fear

i become one person slowly

moving together

as in snow moving
towards the river

3.

(my ears stuffed
with grass/ my tongue
shrivelled like winter
berries) the worker
she talks leads me inside
a building of bricks

doors close

father and mother and
brother their spirits reach
with long eyes to take me away
but worker she grabs me
says "No they're alive"
and man with large hands
holds me down

shut my eyes
to their calling
burrow deep into darkness
only badger can find me
dig me out

4.

when snow falls
worker says "Time
to find a job
nothing here except
in summer cleaning rooms"

bus goes fast
trees are less and less
land rolled flat
by sun smashed by sky
i feel scared like bush rabbit
no place to hide

5.

at first i don't know
lights at corners
walk when hand is raised
cars honk drivers shake
fists and yell

at first i smile
but faces are dead
no one speaks
i become silent as deer's
breath in winter

at first i sit in parks
by trees and rows of sparrows
but they are not nice places
bottles in bushes men
who cough and stare

at first i don't know

6.

beer she comforts me
she makes me
remember words
river pebbles in mouth
makes everyone
my friend
makes me laugh

beer she makes me
beautiful
makes hair shine
raven wings
puts man's hand on
warm thigh makes me
ache nice between legs

beer she makes me
laugh

7.

this scar see
beadwork on my neck
from ear to ear
Marlene did it
cause her man bought me
beer nothing else
no hand in pants
just friendly like

right in front of the bar
she jumped me
slit my throat
so easy it was blood
steaming on snow like deer
guts after the kill

i didn't tell no one
who done it
but when i got out of hospital
i go to sporting store
buy aluminum bat
find Marlene on Rose Street
smash her legs
the sound of bat on bone
like the whack of a home-
run ball

when she gets out
i'm gonna do it again

UNTO ALL LOVERS COURAGE

For, lyke as trees and erbys burgenyth and florysshyth in May, in lyke wyse every lusty harte that ys ony maner of lover spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and florysshyth in lusty dedis. For it gyvyth unto all lovers corrayge, that lusty moneth of May . . .

But nowadayes men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres. That love may nat endure by reson, for where they be the sone accorded and hasty, heete sone keelyth. And ryght so faryth the love nowadyaes, sone hote sone colde. Thys ys no stabylyte.

-- Sir Thomas Malory

MORGAIN LE FAY

From your beard and eyes
I'll melt the ice
when I let you in my bed
but I'll also tell you
of my other lovers
    how they made me shiver
    as they stroked my back
    how they praised my breasts
    with wet tongues

When you feel secure
and fall asleep
I'll suck the magic
from between your legs
seal your eyelids
with water-clear stones
Although you'll call out
no one will hear
You must lie in wait

Sometimes I'll appear
in a changed form
a crow snapping its beak
above your eyes
or a lithe white hound
licking the crack of your ass
Perhaps I'll be a serpent
you must kiss
before I writhe into a woman again

Seldom will I bring you joy
The ripples from my stones
will circle
long after I have let you go

THE TAMING OF THE UNICORN

Three mornings and nothing has happened.
But today she hears a tongue lap water
and hooves sink into sand.
In her mirror she sees
where they squat behind her
silent as the tall grasses. Their faces
frozen in glass: the betrothed, the father,
the lover, the sun encircling
his head like a noose.

A nose sniffs the hem of her skirt
nuzzles her still, white hand.
She wants to move, to frighten
the animal back into the shadow
but the warmth on her skin
recalls the breath of her lover
and the moist darkness of earth
that will hold him
if she fails.

She hums the *W*oman's Song
learned in the hours of waiting,
the hours of the hunt. She sings
softly so the men won't hear, the song
more subtle than the serpent's kiss.
The unicorn lays his head across her lap.
The white beard brushes her arm.
His eyes, liquid as sun, become
the centre of her twisting world.

She touches the horn once
with the tips of her fingers follows
the skein of light as it spirals
before the men pin his legs and her father
with one swift stroke lops off the head
holds it triumphant
above him (her face
caught in the large dead eyes).

FROM THE GARDEN I SEE HIM

He rides the horizon
on a dusty thick-necked stallion
Bottle raised in hand
head thrown back and jeans
hard as leather
"My God," I cry
"Save me from good men"

I gather my skirts and run
but as I near
the gelding flashes white
the bottle is a shield and he
pulls me up beside him
rides me to mountains
that slam the sky shut

There the horse turns hobby
rocks in the garden wind
and he picks hybrid roses
to kill the smell of loving
in our narrow bed

THERE WILL BE NO CHILDREN

It twists in my flat belly, the head
large enough to hold the eyes.
Like the lioness I whelp,
clean the mucous from the nose and mouth
but you refuse
to breathe into the blueing body. Small

as a fallen bird it dies
in the far corner of your mind.
The moist feathers on its back
stick to the blood of its birth,
and its tail coils like a serpent
around your eye. You bury it

among gravestones the moon shapes
into teeth in the earth's black mouth.
I hear the sound of your shovel,
the clawed foot scraping
the shrunken womb.

It will be born again
until you bury it in my bones.
Inside my skull the wings beating
like a pulse.

THE LAST GIANT

When you climb the mountain
to kill your last giant
you leave me at the foot
to praise
as you ascend

(I am tired of battles
Most years you are away
and I fold into aging hide
your children your wounds
swallow them like darkness)

I cannot see beyond the trees
but I hear the giant's roar
the clatter of your weapons
Your scream stones my eyes
I see everything
in pieces
the trees the sun
the shattered
mountain

This is not the way
it was to happen
You are to be
the hero of your own story
the giant a devourer of maidens
and baptized children

He did not ravish me
as I trembled in the shadow
of his bearded coat
but laid your head gently
in my lap

I tied it around
the neck of my horse
and bore it home
hung it in the apple tree
outside our window

Although you cannot see
your tongue is now a blossom
Wrens nest in
the sockets of your eyes
and sing the songs
of your children
dancing

NIMUE

There are many versions

In the popular story
I entice him into a cave
and through magic devices
roll away the sky with a big stone
that even his charms
cannot chip away

In another tale
I persuade him to lie
in a lovers' tomb
to see if there's room
for my bones beside him
Then I coffin him in
with a smile
and a long stone slab

But the truth is

I have shrunk him
carry him in my pocket
a wizened man
no bigger than a raisin
He is not unhappy
He dances on my palm
light as an eyelash
nests in my ear
to whisper me the night

MERLIN

In this time of beasts
they copulate indiscriminately.
Birds with bulls,
snakes with dogs.
The strangest beasts are
born: an eagle's head
joined with a lion's ass,
ribs so huge and bent
they are used for bowls,
toenails so large
they make cups
to drink from.
Beasts that cast
a man's shadow.

And what have I done?
Simply tried to seduce
a water fairy,
one perfect in her form.
No fleshy wings, no scales,
not a fish with feet
but a maiden
who rose from the water
and the lake lay undisturbed--
no storms portended--
how was I to know?

She had no songs
to break men on the rocks
but smiled and nodded
and smiled again
when she asked me for my magic,
promised favours in return

stroked my greying beard
And I, the Devil's son, I
who brought Uther Pendragon
to his queen and caused the birth
of Arthur; I, who foretold the sin
that ruined a kingdom, moved boulders
the Titans could not budge I
laid low by a water maiden,
a willow girl less important
than my smallest hair.

Oh, that I were a winged bull
to batter this stone with horns
to blaze the sky
until I find her
pin her with my hooves
mount her from behind
snort and slobber
sink my teeth into her shoulder
the soft flesh . . . a sound
on the other side of stone?

She often comes to listen
where I rot in this damp hole.
To her my tongue is but a leaf
moved only by a frivolous wind
that dies.
Nimue, I will sing
the song of our golden daughters,
our splendid sons,
In this time of beasts
our beautiful children
cry to be born. Our beautiful

children cry.

It is no use.
Words swallow themselves in echoes.
Not a mermaid, but a maiden . . .
Her legs might as well have been joined,
they did not part
for me.

COUPLE

Once I tried to feed you poisoned apples
but you knew the trick, and gave them to

the birds that I had lured into my garden,
the pattern of their wings beaten in the loam.

Once I stood above you with a knife but
you awoke and swallowed the blade as if

it were a flake of chocolate, then kissed me
with your sharp and silver tongue.

Under my pillow you found a gun, aimed it
at my head, but it shot only blanks.

You had replaced the bullets the night before.
Perhaps you swallowed them too,

and when you kiss me tonight, you'll fire one
down my throat or through my breast.

I am afraid to go to bed.
You are not to be trusted.

LANCELOT

Too old to fight, too tired
and where is the cause?
The red sun falls.
My sword is rust, my armour
green, soft with moss. Still

the wounds speak, they sing
of battles: horses and men
rot in the vulture's shadow,
faces are ribboned, flowers
that are hands
lie strewn on the fields.

Which memories to save?
which memories to wipe
these wounds away, like maggots
eat them clean?

Friendship cannot bring me peace.
Arthur, brother more than king,
gave me his love like a jousting prize,
placed the laurel on my head.
I crowned him
with a rack of horns.

Guinevere my lady brings no comfort.
I saved her from burning
drowned the flames in blood.
Around the stake my friends,
good knights, lay dead as wood
to feed our fire.
Guinevere . . . I could not see
the serpents in her hair.

What memories?
The fair maid who nursed me
into life, begged to be my wife,
my paramour. I offered her
a thousand pounds, the best knight
I could find. Now dressed in white
she drifts through my dark waters.
A hunchback steersman guides her
to the marriage bed. I pay
mass-pennies for her soul
while the cold pale lover
unties her belt
and takes her.

Which memories to save?
Which memories to staunch
this blood? There is no healing.
Age brings neither peace nor silence.
The balsam tree is hacked by axes.
The swan's death trumpet
louder than the mourning dove.

RETURNING

"Could we go back
To the old garden, we should not stay long;
The fruit that we should find would all be fallen,
And have the taste of earth."

--E. A. Robinson

1.

It is difficult to write
of this return:

Dust settles in my throat
Ditches are burnt black
for grass and weeds
grow too high/ will trap
the snow and block
the only road from town

2.

To drop into the past effortlessly
To walk through the yard past rusted
machinery-- gutted stoves and wringerless
washers, and fall through rotted boards
into the dry well, landing at the bottom
soft as down

3.

The way back: the tracks ahead
fill with snow a whiteness
swallows the road
and what is ahead or behind

I drive slowly but the right tires sink
in the hidden ditch. The car leans
into a death. I imagine
my body's freezing, the thick
skin like grapefruit rinds

I push and shovel
claw, a maddened bird, until
fingers numb, I sit in the car
Darkness surrounds me with wings
shadows in snow

I wait
turn on the radio
know he will come
pull me out with his heavy chain
pull me home

4.

We see breath clouds
before the deer, sense warmth
before movement

I will be breath
melting the ice behind his eyes
warming his throat
with my speaking

5.

He has planted
rows and rows of trees
siberian elm black poplar caragana
chokecherry spruce
He has changed
the shape of my sky

6.

When you were away
he says
the wind fell

Windows moved in and out
Shingles were crows in the wind
The caraganas were stripped
like sun-peeled skin
The spruce upended and our land
blew five miles down the road

That is why I moved the house

Now do you understand?

7.

Not even this body
is familiar
Clean-shaven suddenly
he has swallowed his chin
no longer wears glasses
looks at me directly
with plastic eyes
that tear when he tries
to see

Thinner
(Eat better since
you left. Two vegetables
per meal, no crumb cakes,
New York delight, or apple
crisp pudding)
he runs every morning
uphill against the wind
the sun a steam-roller
on his back

I can roll my fist
in the hollow of his chest
cup his hip bones in my hands
Our ribs lock together

Not even this body
is safe

8.

I will be the butterfly
my pattern unrepeated
Just one wing

I will light
on the lined skin
below his eye
delicate
as lost words we both
remember

I will be beautiful
because I won't be whole
Unsuitable
for glass or frame

Wind-stilled wind-driven
My second wing
will be the sky

9.

The first morning
I vacuum corners, watch addresses
shrivel in fire, shine
each spattered mirror
He knows me
by smell, the kitchen sounds,
the bend of my body in sleep

And now I sleep more
except at night when I stand
at the southern window and listen
to the panic of wings

10.

The dog will not come

sits in the corner, snarls
when I pass
Today as I lower her dish
she tries to bite me
clamps her teeth on my sleeve
hangs like a funeral bell

She remembers my leaving

11.

I will be
the tongue of a bird
curled in the cage
of his hands
singing

12.

I fold his t-shirts
place them on his shelves
The cotton is warm from the dryer
stained from his mixing of colors
The smell is clean
like sheets of billowed snow

Today I unpack
the last suitcase
carry it hollow down
the basement

13.

He warms the car
scrapes frost in the dark mornings
doesn't speak
before breakfast

I toast the bread
crack eggs into the oiled pan

Our snares of words
no longer tighten or choke
the air between us

Like wild creatures, we know
when to circle approach
downwind slow

We live in the comfort
where night touches
mute
as wings of moths

LETTERS TO A DISTANT LOVER

". . . but that she was both fayre and good, and much was I beholdyn unto her, but she loved me oute of mesure."

-- Lancelot

THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

Hey, big hummer,
who can strut like you?
Crotch-tight jeans, boots
shiny as pool balls, heels
pounding stars into pavement
you call sky.

Hey, big rooster,
who can cockadoodledo
like you do? You raise the
bloody sun from his corner
your voice, brass
bell in the ring.

Hey, prize fighter,
who can fuck like you?
Women howl your name,
say no man will take
your place, buzz them
like an electric drill.
You spin the world
on the end of your cock.

Hey, big talker,
waited all my life
for a man like you.
Come my way, I'll blow
the fuses in your big machine,
short all your circuits.
I'll break the balls
you rack on the table,
I'll bust your pool cue.

TONIGHT YOU TURN

Tonight you turn
your glass upside down
beer runs into my lap
you throw the keys at me
like money, fuck you,
leave the bar and I
finish my drink
walk to the dark lot
where you piss between cars

All the way home
the wheel holds my shaking
hands and suddenly you want
to protect me
lie on top
press me into earth
as if the sky spit stone
and your broad back would break
the pain

Above me you turn
but not away. Is it here
that it begins?

SO YOU SAY YOU ARE GOING AWAY

as you sleep,my love,
my tongue darts
down your chest, your belly
presses my pigments
into your skin

you will leave

but like a Tattoo Man
carry my serpents
awaken each night
to the sound
of their sedulous mating

YET IN DREAMS OF DYING

your name I call
I ride you
through the night

I thought I shot you
long ago, pushed you
into the river
but you keep rising,
bobbing your dead
eye

where are the fish
that devour, the diving gull,
the water that softens
flesh

my dreams entangle me
in your foaming mane
come morning, I will drown

MY NEW OLD MAN, HE'S SO GOOD

in bed, does tricks, can
come on his head or
swinging from the light
enter me, a cork, Pop!
fills me up
or best when still
I move over him
my slippery skin, snake
swallows mouse, he dies
inside me often, I breathe
him into life, lick him
from darkness, his and mine
or just the night

LEAVING

I have grown old
from leavings

this time
should not matter
I know the words the gestures
as well as
the hairs
in the dip of your back
the white skin
of your inner thigh
the gnashing of your teeth
as you grind the bones of night

but when you go
so silently
your shoulders balancing
the shrinking sun
your heels spinning
the world away

my third eyelid drops
dark spaces grow
between my fingers

NOVEMBER POEM

We have reached a white
and vacant place. Boundaries
disappear: the sky spills
over the horizon
fences are buried, the paths
we broke through snow.
Every bird we create
flies from our palms,
beats itself
against the sky that betrays.

We have reached the end
of all we have known.
You are not the man
I dreamed into being
at the lake edge
man beside me
sun-warm
pants rolled up
as new-born catfish
swarmed around our feet
blessed our skin
with flicks
of their black tails
I am not the woman
you fashioned with a lover's patience
woman of softness and waiting.
Stones I bring you from the fields
are for killing, not for grinding
corn to meal.

But there is no going back.
We move from the open into trees
where the breath of all the animals
we have not seen
hangs crystal in the frozen air.

LETTER

Our first daughter
with pinking shears cut out
her mouth, stuck it on the mirror,
a lipstick drawing, then spoke
her death in blood. Our second daughter
swallowed a word I had carved
into a hook and died across the table
spilling her wine on the white lace cloth.
The youngest son sewed my love
into his pockets and fell into the dead
trees reaching from the river.
I keep their baby teeth in jars, hand
prints in books. All our children kill
themselves, I write.

IN DARKNESS I WATCH YOU

Later, when you sleep with another,
tell her you have never loved
like this, I'll remember tonight
people sitting at your feet
listening to words
pulled through your fingers
like touchstones
worried to the shape of your thoughts

This is fear, you say,
and this. This is loneliness;
the dark stone, despair.
The one never found is love.

In darkness I watch you. I touch
the flower you bought in Old Montreal,
stem tied around a button on my vest.
Yellow petals turning brown, scent is
the last thing to die.

LET ME HAVE AN HONEST SADNESS

I am tired
of the slow sadness
that sits on my shoulders
with the weight of memory

Let me have an honest sadness
that breaks through skin
like shoulder blades, sadness
trailing blood over snow
like a fox dragging its belly
from the roar of the Arctic Cat,
sadness that smashes
with a lead pipe and hands
of an old lover
not forgotten

Sadness that says
There is no place
to escape the wind
There is no room
with unbroken panes
no blanket to cover
your head
The sound in the bush is
the animal
There is no time for
one last poem

THIRD PERSON

you have become my
lover
and I must suffer
your absences
your emptiness in the mailbox cavern
your silence in the phone's mouth

I think of you
in the third person
you are the he
who is not here
there is no you
in my bed just a corpse
legs and arms stiff as prick
wordless flesh heavy on
my chest that heaves
to throw you (he) off
but the body is too solid
a finger in my cunt
everynight no words
just bruises
shaped by me
(or him)

you have become my lover .
heavy stiff (him) bearing down

HANDS OF ABSENCE

the hands
of my absence
are touching you now

it is not the ghost
of the woman who died
in this house
not the woman of bloodied sheets
seeking revenge for betrayed love

my hands search only
for presence

do not tremble
they are not strong enough
to strangle or bruise

they are just
fingers of memory
light and smooth
on your white shoulder
as you lie uncovered
in sleep

LETTER TO A DISTANT LOVER

The leper
that I wrote of yesterday
of course is you

No mouth for speaking
only the eyes whole
fires in the caves of his face
He begs
stretches his hand
but the flesh has been eaten
from the centre of his palm
and he has no fingers to touch
or grasp
The coins I place
drop through

I have not seen him
since the marketplace
but his eyes are pinned
between my breasts
Their flames lead me through darkness
to write to you

Perhaps there is something here
you can understand

I will be home soon

AFTER

tossing the sheet aside
that covered words
licking sweat
from her upper lip
she says
        Poets cannot live
together. Now, for instance,
we wonder who will write
the first poem
            about us.

sliding his fingers
up and down her wet thighs
he says
      More important,
whose poem will be better?

REUNION

I fall into
the pattern of your loving
follow your movements as the wing
follows the mind
of the bird

the warm silent places
forget so easily remember

YOU

you are as perfect
as my lover
ought to be

that is

: the delight of your tongue
splits the skin of berries
against your teeth

: in your eyes I see
a strike of fishes ring
the brass sky

: a kingbird lights
upon your finger cracks
the seeds of night

you are as perfect
as my lover
ought to be

gather stripes
from tiger lilies
to build a cage
that holds me

WHEN ALL THE WORDS ARE LOST

When the wind lies
along the branches by our window
and only sparrows move,
shake snow from folded wings,
I listen for whispers.
Your eyes dart beneath their lids
as if your body were too small
to hold this terror.

When the river is silenced
I hold the smell
you leave me
when you turn away, watch
you fall beyond the edge of fear
and winter, into darkness
that only you can name.

When all the words are lost
my fingers touch your sleeping.
I long to tell you:
the river breaks,
birds return and love
is as possible as mountains.

DEATH WISH

who hath woe? who hath sorrow?
who hath contentions? who hath babbling?
who hath wounds without cause?
who hath redness of eyes?

Proverbs 23:29

Give up words: a good knife, honed: and a needle
drawn across an iron bar, set in a matchbox.

-- John Thompson

dead, dead, dead
I've put a bullet
through my head

I've used the blade
the noose, the gun
and still my dying's
just begun

Before the poems, he says
we were happy
Now you look too closely
You lift the corners
of shadows. Before

we wore the same
path into grasses
Together we planted
trees

he brought me gold
from poplar, red-wax
berries to string
around my neck

I spread my arms
bark seals my mouth
crows fly away
with the blossoms
of my eyes

I have lost my mind

look for it
under the corners of shadows
check hospital lists
phone the police
who ask for facts

it is
: as large as the navel's
eye

: as old as the swallow's
circle

: blue is woman is imagination

Reward Offered:

I will give you children
that look like you
and I'll forget the sound
of naming

we argue again

with the cold wire of logic
he slices into my head
a mirror of words
hiding his face

I break open
my veins
with shards of glass
say, look
see what I am

looking in looking in-
side, the eye of the needle,

the knife searches the gut
red organs spill from

the cave of flesh, glisten
like new snakes in the sun

and do we know and is there time
to know before our muscles

kick one last time, before
the mind is nothing, a stone

at the bottom of darkness, never
split open for its bright thunder

On the weekend my friends visit me.
We wear each other's words like skin.
He is on the outside.
Tells them once I made bread.
Now I burn things.
They will grow hungry this weekend.
But he has bought doughnuts from the bakery.
Perhaps with a little cheese . . .

They say: You must get out of here.

(I have seen his death
many times

the wheel wrenched from his hands
his head breaking the windshield
the slap of his flesh on pavement
a gathering of crows

I am a charming widow
blacken my nails and eyelids
on each death petal
inscribe misery

the mortician will taste my sorrow
as I choose the coffin
the minister lift my skirt
on the rise of the grave
the lawyer kiss my breasts
while I read the will

Rest in peace my love)

Strands of barbed wire
taut between us, tufted with
clumps of hair. On one fencepost
sits the hawk, its eyes and talons
filed to the hunter's points,
waiting for the quick
movement in the grass.

At night I feign sleep, say: My brain is knotted,
turning in my head like a grinding wheel. I am
pinned to its spinning centre. I must sleep.
He is considerate.
Spills his semen in the shower, the water small hands.
I bend around his back, liking his touch outside of
me, his warmth, the fine hairs on the backs of his
legs.

We watch cold stars
through his telescope
The double stars are one
from our distance. He splits
them with his mirror, makes
two from one
on the bear's tail

Method:

wind the rope
through the folds of my neck
throw it over the branch
my kicking feet shatter
the shining air and the sky
explodes its red
stars in my head

a black widow, I hang
from a wind-strung thread
in the dark hollow
behind his eyes

Clouds on the horizon are peaked like mountains; the sunset spills on stubble. With my woman's hands I scrub it clean, cleanse the stain of dying.

one day the world will invert
the clouds become snow drifts
hard enough to hold a woman
without her breaking
through

soon I will step from the roof
and walk

Dust builds between the windowpanes. Every
Saturday I vacuum them, graveyard of flies.
The wind sands the glass, makes windows breathe
in, breathe out, distorting reflections, faces
mirrored in the night.

tonight I dream
of hawks circling
I catch their falling
feathers to camouflage
my skull

lower they swoop
their golden eyes sun-
spikes nailed above
pointed beaks

I am one of them
fly in the wing's rush
to the sun's pounding
heart

when they land
they are people
hanging awkward from branches
dropping
broken
on roots gnarled in stone

make this food holy
this song holy
this body holy
make it dance a moth-
dance with its powdery bones

Bird feathers.

The muted grey of horned larks.
The yellow of a meadowlark's breast.
My beautiful cats--
they've even eaten the wings,
my cats, they've eaten the wind.

Method:

Drive to the curve above the riverbed. Push the pedal to the floor, the hand inside the jeans. Drive this orgasm over the edge, the blood rush exploding like glass.

Run this pain down
Beat it
with the flat of your feet
Break it
with the flint of your hand
Run this pain
down

Once I made bread: The smell of yeast blossoming in
sugar water, the dough pliable under my palms, kneading,
patting, pushing the dough flat with the heels of my
hands, scooping fingers through butter, polishing the
smooth brown with yellow.
After the bread comes crusted and hot from the oven,
I cut him a slice,
the steam escapes like pain

Method:

only debtors sink
deliberate as stone
into the river

arms of lovers
dragged from the mud bottom
are peeled of skin
hands scraped raw
from one last effort
to grip the railings
as they lept
the weight of pain
lightening when they fall

if my finger remains
hooked on the metal balustrade
wrap it in the hair of night
and place it under your pillow

it will bring you dreams

my clothes are crusted
with food
my teeth are growing
skin
my hair smells strong
like an animal's hide

no wonder he unwinds
from my hands
a paper bird
flaming towards the sun

tonight he starts a fire
to dry my hair

I want to curl
in the lick of flame
in the owl-down ash
soft as the skin of eyes

my bones burnt pure my flesh a fire my eyes blacker
than dead stars
sprinkle me into an early wind
look for me
drifting down
touching rose berries with
gentle frost

My friends say come and live with us. The flat above our house. Now there are two French Canadians. We want them to leave. They make too much noise. Floorboards squeaking, furniture banging. Always fucking. We like you. Come. Plant a garden in our yard, between the lilac bushes.

still the dying
naked in public
open your mouth
say
ahhhh

Plan a winter death:

walk into waves of snow
lie like an ancient shell
filling with the sound of

sink into wind ripples
curve of the body
snow
falling

Plan a wind death:

on the highest hill
where grasses bend
in one direction
I swallow the
rain-slicked wind

it surges down my throat
thrashes my voice until
there are no words
to tell of pain

dying inside out
the wind my fiercest cancer

looking in and looking
the knife searches
glistens
and do we know
and is there
time

Taste the pistol's steel:

my tongue sticks
to cold metal

I squeeze the trigger
splatter my empty mouth
on the kitchen wall
a crimson pattern
of words
never said

I feel guilt for everything. I have not cleaned the house, have not made supper, have not walked the dog
Have not loved well or enough
Have not put the candle in the window
Have not wiped the dust from his eyes
Have not touched his perfect bones
or dried his wounds with my hair

blood in the mouth, the blood-
worm crawls behind the eyes
no words, just blood and a thin
bone name that snaps between
fingers, broken
wish

wash dishes
wash clothes
wash floor
wash hair
wash hands
wash away
wash away
wash away

Listen to
the shape of my hands
the voice in my wrists

Break through my skin
find me whole
drag me

free

plant a dead tree
on my grave
branches stripped
to hold a crow's
murder, sharp tongue
crazing the sky
with thin black
lines of death

I will leave
the taste of earth
in your sleeping mouth
the print of my tongue
on each closed eye

my darling, teach me how
to die

HUMANS AND OTHER BEASTS

Mother was an ape, I don't know
who my father was.

-- Tarzan

ANIMALS OF WINTER

The animals move with snow
past the tree-line, the wood-pile, up
to the house. White, silent as frost they lie
under the window, listen to the warm
sounds of your sleeping. By morning
you think they have faded to dreams;
you scrape night from the window.
They stretch on the doorstep like dogs.
After years of wandering they have returned
through ice and hunger to this place
where memory is smell and the sound
of your footsteps behind the grey walls.
When you look closely, their skin encloses
an emptiness larger than hunger and you
circle inside their eyes.

COASTAL MAN

He tells me
he is afraid of oceans
built his house on the cliff
Trees cage him from
the waves' gleam, the women
washed ashore from his past
like dying whales too large
for his sorrow to contain
And all his children playing
in the sand are drawn each day
closer to the water's lure

Inland he hears their cries
(the women the children)
imagines the shrieks of gulls
diving for heads
fishermen toss into the sea

Inland he tells me
bears snuffle around his window
gouge his door
Once his screen was torn
and a huge snout pushed through
He knows they will get him
drag him from his bed
over the forest floor the rocks
bleeding to the ocean
where all will fall upon him
savage gulls

OD MAKES A JOURNEY WEST

Od wears a Calgary stetson
tall snoot boots, rents
a purple van

Just out of Moose Jaw
double highway thinning West
Od spots a figure on the shoulder
The hand holds a tape recorder
waves a microphone
to bring him down
Od fascinated by captured sound
pulls back on the steering wheel
eases his bucking van
to a stop
It is a woman,
ear phone plugged in
a poncho concealing her symmetry

What are you doing, Od cries
as she sinks into the seat
beside him
Listening to my voice
she sighs It's the only way
to learn my rhythms
She places a wire in her other ear
What's your name Od shouts
into the microphone
Call me Ode to...

Od is pleased by her grammar
and the width of her feet
propped on the dashboard

Here is a lady to balance
on my bars
Here is one
who can jump on the double
jump so high

Take me to the sea
she breathes
I must find shells to shod these feet
I must walk on the ocean find the union
of sky and water

Od waves his hat in one hand
kicks the gas pedal
with the heel of his boot
rides straight into the dusty sun

SCULPTRESS

(for Gladys)

She is too strong
for any man
to love her

She is not soft
under the pumping body
every bone breaks
the surface like leaping fish
reminding him that below
the calm skin is another
darkness a different light

Nor does she close her eyes
but watches his every
movement the inside
of his mouth as he shouts
his coming

Only in the grey light
fingering through the shutters
will she sleep and he follows
the outline of her body
like the tombstone marble
she carves a shape so pure
so beautiful
that he forgets
to look for his name

THE MAGICIAN

When the magician left, he forgot
to join the sawed woman. The upper-half
asleep in her box, did not see him go.
But when she awoke, she knew--
all the rabbits had disappeared,
his cape had been pulled
from the laundry basket
and the house was clear of smoke.

For days her head screamed,
her legs kicked the box, but no one came.
The neighbours had heard goings-on in
that place before and he had fooled them
more than once.

When the magician remembered,
he cancelled his travelling band and returned
home. The lower box was empty, but the eyes in
the head opened and the woman said, "It's too
late now. I've found a rat for a lover.
He's eaten my dainties, my most delicate
bits. When he has swallowed my tongue,
we'll sing you the song of bone. The wind,
my rat lover, and me."

The magician buried her head in the yard
and covered her grave with stones, but stones
couldn't hold down the wind or still the rat
scuttling along the darkness above his head.

WRITER

you've gotta ask yourself
why you're in it

take tonight, for instance
the party after the reading
went into the kitchen
to get a beer
the professor's wife
she gives me a blow job
right there in front of
the fridge

words pull them in
soft and big-eyed at your feet
they want your tongue
inside their mouths, your cock
immortalizing their cunts
in your greatest poem

you've gotta ask

SOUTH OF MOOSE JAW

"Tom, a crazy man,
walked all the way
from Minnesota,
carried his life on his back"
(up and left his wife and children)

tall Nordic man
a carpenter's apron
big hands hanging
like small animals
bound to his wrists

"Neighbours wouldn't believe
he'd build that damn boat
till the C.P.R. unloaded
engine parts and Tom began
to forge his tools"

pliers and hammer
hacked out of iron
on the display case
a water clock
circles time

Letters on cardboard label:
Pliers Hammer Clock
"Even made his own steel teeth
a machine for puffing wheat
and a violin"

"Tom, a crazy man,
at 50 flew his coop/ built his boat
at 60 tried to drag it/ with a horse
and his back across

this bugger of a prairie
to the river to the ocean"

Picture:
the hull hunched in
spring snow gullied with dirt
dim man leaning in doorway

"Tom, the crazy man,
the boat killed him
the boat broke him"

Tom, strength of three men,
coffined
legs and hands and wide back
set deep into dirt beside the boat
a sign nailed to the hollow hull--
"Monument of Labour
To All Early Pioneers
To Whom We Owe So Much"

Boat and man uprooted
displayed his grave marked
by two white slats crossed
by a cardboard label tacked to the centre
TOM SUKANEN

Five feet too deep
for the Saskatchewan River
the keel sinks into grass

GAME FARM

1.
the polar bears are not
white as Arctic snow
but yellowed like old sheets

they trudge pigeon-toed
around their circular pool
around the piles of stones
the Goodyear tires

a worker in a red hat
tosses day-old buns
to the polar bears
they open yawning mouths
swallow lazily
flop loose sacks of flesh
on their cement shore

2.
Tribute to the Timber Wolf
the sign says
and yes
there they are
a pack of legends only a fence away
The Timber Wolves: fat and lazy
old dogs

a huge male
grey as early mist
stretches himself upright, walks
the length of his kennel
feet sore and swollen
nails click on the hard earth

a black wolf
opens his eyes once
a yellow fire rages in his massive head
then the eyelids droop
and he disappears

becomes a dog again
lolling at the feet of children
who throw the ends of weiners
over the fence

3.
some click their cameras
others growl or bark
wanting these animals
to <u>do</u> something
(after all, we paid our money)

even the tiger lies
like a tattered rug
and licks one striped paw gently

the snowy owls
sitting on their straw bales
don't respond to hoots
or fingers poked through
don't even try to bite

their eyes black holes
in the white heads
perhaps they don't see us
perhaps they dream of trees
and moons to balance on
or glide silently above our heads
the feathery snow falling
with each sweep of their wings
the snow covering the straw

filling in the paw tracks
shrouding the polar bears
in the cold white dream

MOTHER WAS A LOVELY BEAST

mother was a lovely beast
she gave to me a lovely feast
three teats hanging from her chest
I found the third one quite the best

a coarse black beard grew from her chin
she worried it was due to sin
but she was good and she was kind
and father didn't seem to mind

with three tits you can suckle three
and still leave room enough for me
besides you're quiet as a flower
a wife's tongue makes a marriage sour

he stroked her beard as she stroked his
they lived a life of total bliss
till people came from field and town
to see my mother's chest and down

so father built a stage for her
to bare her breasts and show her fur
he tried to teach her how to scowl
to walk on fours, to moan and growl

she sat on stage head-bowed, alone
while father bought a megaphone
The Bearded Venus he would say
A Woman -- and he'd make them pay

still mother uttered not a sound
but when my father went uptown

she raised her skirts to show her hair
and let men mount her like a mare

mother was a lovely beast
she gave to me a lovely feast
three teats hanging from her chest
I found the third one quite the best

ANDY AND GEORGE, FRIENDS

(for David Arnason)

Last night they came to visit,
talked of women who dance
with balding men, wiggle
their asses to attract
those who sit
backs to the wall.
These new women
want to be blessed
with blood. They want men
who put their balls in glass
cases on display.

The other talked of rape,
men who turn
icons to the wall,
hold boiling water
above the woman's face
until she opens. A fantasy
for a film about the prairie.

This morning my lover and I
walk to the river to see the eclipse,
the last of this century, the last
before we die. We hold hands, watch
the joining of sun and moon,
whisper This is holy.
A bat, thinking it is night,
stumbles into the sky.

NO LONGER TWC PEOPLE

Poems by Lorna Uher

With my fist I stroke you
I could have told you long ago
Geese wedge into sky
You're so covered with scars
Legs joined
Everything that wants to live
You demand me be gentle
The dream enfolds you
Now is the still and rotting time

Poems by Patrick Lane

The space between my ribs
You have always driven into silence
We have only begun our seasons
Behind your face
We have begun to bury ourselves
Beneath your skirts
You have never learned
Out of mountains
Now is the time for patience

No Longer Two People is a sequence of poems that explores the male and female visions. The poems were written alternately-- I began the sequence, Patrick responded, I responded to his response and so on. The images happened spontaneously as did the stance taken by the two personae.

I believe this sequence is an important section of my thesis because the rest of the manuscript was written out of a female voice. Here I have a chance to expand that voice by responding to a male viewpoint. As a result, there are two parallel tracks that can be defined as male/female or anima/animus that touch, withdraw, attack and come together.

The title defines what we were trying to do. Although the poems begin in the personal, they hopefully move beyond the two writers into the whole of humanity. The woman is all women; the man, all men. Thus the poems include both the individual and the archetypal.

As a form, the poem points to another direction for the sequence poem. The line and stanza length, the rhythms and structures were shared not only by the content, but also by the emotions evoked by the previous poem and by the style of the other writer. This influence of the other produced the energy that moves the poem from its initial anger and frustration to the final patience at the end.

"Though these two people once existed for me, they exist no longer. The 'vision' of them gave me a preliminary emotion; then little by little their actual presences became blurred; they developed into a fiction and then disappeared altogether, or rather they were transformed into all kinds of problems. They are no longer two people, you see, but forms and colours; forms and colours that have taken on, meanwhile, the idea of two people and preserve the vibration of their life."

-- Pablo Picasso

1.

With my fist
I stroke you
never the open
palm but knuckles
skin drawn tight
bone over bone your ribs
so many the spaces between
the spaces

I net and renet but
the real fish slip through
only dreams are caught
delicate as language
hooked
so sluggish
in their writhing

2.

I pour your coffee
down the drain
Violence, you push me
to violence, you say
Why do you want
the animal in me?

I burn your poems
scatter the ashes over your toast
wait for you to split me
in two like the flat fish
fashioned into sky

Instead you must talk
explain my perversions
ask: What do you want?

I want
to feel my fist
push through
to the cries that were
before words

I want to swallow you
like the great whale
carry you in my sea where
no language will bring a birth
only the fire that burns
in your fingers, the cock
that pins my dying tongue

The space
between my ribs contains
only a loss. As a child
I dreamed the story of the
mother made from me
and lying alone in bed
counted my cage of bone
the stolen life.

In that turning wheel
called darkness
where dreams, impossible
as fish, swim below
the hunched carapace
that is the sky,
I swim, endlessly
imagining my escape.

The image of the heron
holds my mind. Always
in the distance I see
the great brown stumps
of her legs. Her patience
as she waits for my arrival
is the reptile's dance
the eyes that still me
into death where every
escape is a return
an endless entering
where I swim milk-white
among the clustered eggs.

I could have told you long ago
you would not find the perfect word
even though you carved it
out of pain and bone
during your last starvation.

In your search beyond
warmth and touching, your eyes broke
in the great ice-fields. The vision
a whiteness: wings and voices turned
to snow, and the sky swallowed
the land you walked on
your feet breaking through
like stones everything breaking

Now you have returned, old and tired
upon my doorstep. A winter man
softened by frost. Blind,
you must touch to find your way.
It is too late for me
to lead you into light. I could have
told you long ago
You would not find the perfect word
though you carved it
out of pain and bone.

You have always driven into silence
planted trees to shelter you
on that prairie that made you
naked. Everything is

measured in space. The outland
that made you care. I seed
as the land is bred, see you
chapped and bleeding, walking

into wind as if that silence was
enough. The man I am tears leaves,
strips wood through winter
into spring, leaving only enough

to breed the dead. Caragana, lilac,
belts of shelter you create
to call a home. Naked you come
to silence but when the wind dies

you turn to dreams of rain. Old
wife, old house, old darkness:
as that woman who walks into
the west, dark as memory is, black

with clothing and wrinkles, without
fear, without anything a man could call
love. You go this way, woman, waiting
like a bird wandered onto the prairie

without wings, demanding nothing
but the roots you call claws
curled into earth, your beak
an opening that kills.

Geese wedge into sky
split the hollow in two.
Waves fragment the sun
and leaves, once supple in spring,
break.

I hold your trembling as wind
rattles your tongue:
how to go on, how to...
go on. The sound of the door
closing is the final note of pain.
This autumn everything is breaking.

And geese wing into silence
away from the cold that crawls
towards us, levelling mountain
into prairie. Our fear lies
in recognition. For once the thing is
named, it will not leave
but hang around your neck
like every bird you killed
and track my scent like every wound
I left behind in snow.

We have only begun our seasons.
The time of naming. A thing
crawls inside me, sluggish,
cold as snakes are among stones.
I have opened myself
for the last time. A door
is two visions. My hands
tear at the flesh of my belly
and I fold into the wound,
search for the lost
among organs that demand
a life.

You will find me
like this when you return:
back broken, and the flesh
zippered with needles,
black stitches
tracks of missing birds.

You're so covered with scars
you forget where they come from.
Like birds they sing to the wounded
who descend from the railings of bridges
to follow you. In bars the cripples limp
to your table, drag their bleeding casts
towards the criss-cross of your face.
The old sit beside you in stations,
cough their lives into your lap. And now
I have crawled from under your bed to lie
against you. I trace the braille of your body:
the broken lip, the hole in the side
of your face. But you are emptied of stories.
Instead you press into my skin. The scars
cover me like feathers.

Behind your face a fish swims
covered with pale feathers.
At night when you lie
sleeping among the green
dreams your body calls love.
I lift your eyelids, watch
his wandering among the white
rivers of your mind.

Legs joined, you rise from
our bed of sand and bump
your nose against the walls.
You allow yourself
no tail, intricate
as oriental fans, no neon glow.
You are muddy, cold and hard
shaped for the thrust
to your own reflection.

Grown huge and grotesque, I
watch you through the glass. In spite
of your beautiful leaping
you lack the strength to break
the surface, It would be easy
to scoop you up
allow you arms and thighs
or fashion wings from my hair
to give you the grace of birds
for you have made me
in command of this dream.

But dreams are slippery as fish
and if I draw you from the water,
I might crush you between my fingers
or you might leap from the net
to swim your mad circles in my eye.

We have begun to bury ourselves.
Each day we emerge more slowly,
look at the trees as they strip
themselves for winter. The sky is
filled with falling and everything
that wants to live escapes:
geese, wild wedges burning south,
the swarms of teal,
black scars cut into clouds.

In dark rooms we find our corners,
collect the books and papers
that are someone else's dream.
Prepare for sleep. This season
is as hard as white, the pure bodies
we have thought ourselves into being.
Closing we give each other
the little deaths, afraid of sound,
afraid of the silence that devours.

It is almost never morning. The sun
escapes and night surrounds
us like an ancient wound. It is the time
for rituals, the time of corn and gourds,
locks of hair, the bones of birds.
Trees like broken fingers reach
awkwardly into the sky they hate
and cold, that broken lidless eye
stares down from the perfect north.

We wish for scabs. We want to be
inside where trees of blood
hide among the scars, the flesh

that calls us human. We break,
tear at our skin and watch the red
burn as it searches among
the forests of hair, black trails
reaching for our fingers, the maps
of our living left behind.

Everything that wants to live
escapes. The snap of your suitcase,
the closing door.
Winter is too harsh out here, you say.
It closes like a fist around the body
and I, a thin man, so easily break.

Everything creates its own
escape. Leaves sink into earth;
teal drive their hunger south.
Still, the geese behind our house, fattened
by children and old men who skip
flat stones with thin blue wrists,
stay the fall. The circles they swim
around the sun and the hunter's moon
begin to shrink. At night the cold stalks
until they are snared in ice
a perfect stillness
in the pale and crystal dawn.

Beneath your skirts every man
you have ever known
hangs flayed from the hooks
you call your love. Shrunk
to the size of hummingbirds
their plucked bodies smile
loosely like skin bags
whose mouths are openings
without sound. I break you,
tear apart the webbed sex
and rise within, huge
in your empty. Beneath me
you move in a sea of sweat
shaking with violence. The words,
the songs, the rituals, the
death repeated endlessly. Woman
dead three thousand years,
your life can no longer be
called love. You are
the mask, hunter.

You demand me be gentle
but cannot see
the softness that is
there. Look, my teeth are
falling out; my fists blossom
into fingers and feathers
grow from under my nails.
When you lie with me
you sink into s swell of flesh
soft as snow.

You must cage all your birds
split their tongues for singing
but everything you are
afraid to call love
nests under my skirts
where each season is a smell
and wings too delicate and wild
for your blunt fingers, their clumsy taming
brush my thighs.

1.

You have never learned
the meaning of the word
gentleness: tell me
you will kill me
for poems. My death
will be by your hand,
the instrument you speak
with. Every age of you
is death. I have seen
your future, black,
birdlike, riding buses
into the heart of the city
where you weave your
tapestry with names
of the past, each one
a perfect word, sewn
like icons, every mouth
closed by the claw
that holds your needles.

2.

I was never afraid of love,
the images you curl in
when you lie. Woman,
the secrets of your hell
are only beginning to move
to the surface; broken teeth
cut through your skin,
flay me as I sink into
the burned feathers
you call a body. This is
the name of fear.
It turns me to mountains
where I create word, the
wall you rage against.

Face called despair, face
of masks, of vacant staring,
your images are eyes, mouths
black and open in the night.
I know the children
who burned in your brass mouth
the men with genitals slit
who bled to death
on the steps of your temple
calling out your name.

The dream enfolds you
in a softness you had long ago
forgotten.

Soon you can't remember
your enemy's face, the brass mouth,
the devouring eye, the wound that closes
like a flower around your ecstacy.
You were prepared for knives
not the touch of fingers,
for teeth instead of tonguing.

Let me call you still-hunter;
silent as the hawk's fall
you wait in moist shadow
until moss grows between your legs
and wasps hang a nest from your rifle.

Out of mountains, out of cold stone
I have fashioned a word
that will destroy you, hunter woman.
You who wear the skins of birds,
who decorate your dark breasts
with the skulls of snakes,
the fragile clicking bones
whose song is crow.

Out of mountains, out of cold passes
I have fashioned a word
that will claim your shadow,
that will climb through your skin
and enter your heart.
I will cast this word in stone.
I will cast this word in sand.
I will cast word in earth
where your power hides trembling.

Your body will fall, hunter woman.
Your voice will be silence, hunter woman.
Your song will be dust.

Out of cold, out of the distant mountains
I have come with a word
that will destroy you, hunter woman,
and when you are silence
I will reach into your death
and with my spittle
I will fashion from your dust
a word that is not a word
and I will take you back to my mountain
and speak you into life.

Now is the still
and rotting time. Tomatoes suspend
in green from the blackened vine.
Carcasses lie exposed
like lovers in the sun.

And we await
the forgiveness of winter: drifts
to bury all the dead we left behind.

Then we will come to one another
with the simplicity of trees
stripped branches holding all
that will survive.

Now is the time
for patience. All the animals are fallen,
the birds escaped. Furrows, black ruts,
wrinkle the face of the earth.
Only the bound remain, rotting potatoes,
the curled black vines where tomatoes hang
shrivelled by frost.
There is no forgiveness,
only a blind woman calling out her dead,
the snow, the broken earth.
Alone at night
I look down upon your sleeping,
hear the unborn crying for release.
Castrate, stripped of seed, I break
a trail through the snow.
There is no looking behind.
Everywhere the wind covers my passing.